Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 06-35-158
Week of August 28, 2006

EFFORTS ENHANCED TO PROVIDE ANTHRAX INFORMATION ONLINE

Efforts are being stepped up to ensure the most up-to-date information on anthrax is available online to Saskatchewan producers and the general public.

Adele Buettner, Executive Director of the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS), said added measures have been taken in response to concerns raised by cattle farmers at Anthrax Information Sessions held in various parts of the province.

"Many producers who attended [the sessions] stated it was difficult to find current information on the web," she said.

"Therefore, in an effort to provide easy-to-find data, we are working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), and providing regular updates online."

The information is available on the FACS website at www.facs.sk.ca.

New cases of anthrax were confirmed in new areas of the province in late July and early August. Cattle vaccinations have also been ongoing, as many Saskatchewan farmers take steps to minimize the risk of their herds contracting the disease.

Since shortly after the first anthrax outbreak, the FACS has been working closely with the CFIA, SAF and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine to ensure producers and the public have current and accurate information on the disease. The internet has proven to be an effective and convenient vehicle to get that material out on a timely basis.

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AGE VERIFICATION FOR CATTLE A VITAL MARKETING TOOL

With the possibility of mandatory age verification for beef cattle just around the corner in Alberta, Saskatchewan cattle producers should consider their own needs and cattle marketability in the coming months.

April 1, 2007, is the proposed mandatory age verification date for Alberta. With 75 per cent of Saskatchewan-fed cattle and over 65 per cent of feeder cattle going into the Alberta market, age verification makes good business sense for Saskatchewan producers, as well.

Sandy Russell, Beef Economist with the Livestock Development Branch of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, says presently, age verification is the only export-safe classification.

"It isn't mandatory to have age verification, but if you want to export – particularly to Japan, where cattle have to be less than 21 months – then our only route right now is age verification," she said.

Dennis Fuglerud, president of the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, agrees, and says it's important for producers to ensure their cattle's value in all markets.

"With age verification, the Canadian beef industry will be eligible for all markets," he stated. "It's also a way for producers to add value from possible premiums on their age-verified cattle."

Age verification is rapidly becoming the expected norm in markets around the world, and verification from the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) is considered a standard those markets will accept.

The Government of Saskatchewan currently recommends voluntary age verification, meaning it is up to the individual producer to decide whether or not to verify his or her stock.

The Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association also supports voluntary age verification, and Fuglerud has an important reminder about its benefits.

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"Producers who don't age-verify their cattle will be missing out on any premiums that may be paid for age-verified cattle," he noted.

Roy Rutledge, manager of the Assiniboia and Weyburn auction marts, says although age verified cattle won't always fetch a premium, it is a good, modern business practice to verify your herd.

"I have sellers who say to me, 'What if we do it (age verify) and don't get anything extra?' and I tell them, 'It doesn't cost you anything to verify either, so what are you out?'" he said.

It is not necessary to age-verify cattle down to the exact date of their birth. Working with their stock tags, farmers can enter birth dates that correspond with tag numbers (if available), or can enter a calving start date associated with their tags.

The CCIA takes age verification only though its website at www.canadaid.com. The process can be a bit daunting for those who are not comfortable using the internet, but there are a number of resources to use for help, including asking the younger generation to navigate the process with you, asking a fellow producer who is familiar with the process, or calling CCIA toll-free at 1-877-909-2333.

"It's about marketing opportunities," said Russell. "Any time there's an opportunity to capitalize on the market from your business perspective; it's good to take it."

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AGE VERIFICATION – COMPUTER SKILLS NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRED

Age verification for Canadian cattle is done entirely online, which can be anything from daunting to annoying, especially if producers don't have an internet connection in the house.

While age verification is not mandatory, it is a strongly recommended process that will make cattle much more marketable, especially in the most convenient marketplace: Alberta. That province is considering mandatory age verification by April 2007. Choosing not to age-verify their cattle could mean lost marketing opportunities and lost revenue for Saskatchewan cattle producers.

"Nobody can do it for you," stressed Jason Dean with the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association. "Keep records. The information is yours; you are the one who has it. Get someone else to go on the computer if you need to."

The Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) is the national agency dedicated to maintaining the database. The CCIA does not accept paper applications for age verification, so producers planning to use the system will have to submit information through the agency's website, at www.canadaid.com.

No matter what level of computer literacy producers may possess, Roy Rutledge, manager of the Assiniboia and Weyburn auction marts, says it's not a good idea for them to just assume that somebody else in the industry, such as their auctioneer or veterinarian, will handle the verification for them.

"We have certainly been assisting people by telling them where to go for help," said Rutledge, "but we can't keep up at our end if people are going to expect us to age-verify for them, too."

For those who have privacy concerns about sharing so much of their operation's information over the internet, Dean says to remember the database is industry-controlled.

"The industry owns the database, and gives very limited access to it. We set the policy," he noted.

In Alberta, where proposed mandatory age verification could take effect next spring, third parties like veterinarians, auction marts and even public libraries have joined forces with producers to help with the age-verification process, offering internet access and help learning the system. It can simply be a matter of knowing who to ask for a little help when it comes to the internet.

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Rutledge says, above all, don't go without verification, and get help with the process if you need it.

"Call your tag supplier, if you don't know who else to talk to. Get on the bandwagon; get 'er done, and nobody has to worry about it anymore," he stated.

To age-verify their cattle online, producers should take the following steps:

1. Visit www.clia.livestockid.ca.
2. Follow the instructions on the screen. If it is your first time visiting the site, you will need to choose "Option 2," and create an account. (The website will automatically direct you to the right place and ask for the necessary information, which will include your operating name and a current tag number.)
3. When you have set up your account, the site will allow you to log in as a registered user, and you will be ready to enter information for your cattle. When you set up your account, make sure you record your user name and password for future reference.
4. Don't forget to look for the "log out" or "sign out" button on the page when you are done, in order to close the connection you have on the site and keep your own computer secure.

If cattle producers do not have access to a computer, CCIA states that they may designate a third party to use the site on their behalf. Contact the CCIA for information on third party users.

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DEFEATING THE ARMYWORM

To spray or not to spray: that is the question. Whether it is nobler to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous armyworm infestation, or to risk seeing tight margins eroded by insecticide costs: that is the question facing farmers after an army of insects cut a swath across much of the province this year.

Dale Risula, Integrated Cropping Management Systems Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), said this year has been a particularly bad year for the Bertha armyworms.

"Historically, if you take a look at Bertha armyworm, it only seems to be a pest, on average, two or three out of 20 years," he said. "The cycle seems to be dependant on a number of factors – more than just weather, perhaps also the number of acres that are seeded to the host crops where they are attracted to lay their eggs."

Risula said the timing of the life cycle of the crop and the life cycle of the Bertha armyworm timed out in early August to result in significant damage.

"The worms were in their later stages of development and the crops had lost their leaf material, so the only thing left for them to chew on was the pods. If they start doing damage to the pod, that is a direct impact on the yield," he said.

"Contrast that to the damage that they would have done to leaf material earlier, that would be less of an impact on the yield than them doing damage to the pod itself," Risula added.

"If [the armyworms] are there in sufficient numbers – meaning a certain economic threshold – then they will do significant damage, so control measures have to be taken in order to deal with that."

Aye, there's the rub.

Given the tight margins in farming, producers have to make a judgement call about whether the cost of spray will outweigh the damage from the insect.

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"I think it is important that, if they decide to spray, it be based on good economical threshold information," said Risula.

According to SAF, if there are under 10 larvae per square metre in a field, it might not be worth spraying.

A chart to help determine the economic threshold for spraying, and more detailed information on the Bertha armyworm, is available at www.agr.gov.sk.ca.

Risula noted there are other options to help control populations for the coming crop year.

"Crop diversification and rotation is probably the most important thing you can do in terms of lessening the potential impact of the moth laying its eggs on suitable host crops the following year," he said. "Not growing canola every year is a good thing, or, if farmers do grow canola every year, at least space the fields far apart. That, in itself, won't deal with the problem completely, but it will at least help."

Risula said another option is to manipulate the timing of seeding.

"You want to avoid anything that flowers at the time when the moth usually emerges, sometime near the end of June," he noted. "If the plants are flowering, that seems to be a greater attractant to the egg-laying capabilities of the moth. They are attracted to a flowering plant quite readily."

Another option is crop selection, since cereal and pulse crops are less vulnerable to Bertha armyworms than canola.

"None of these options are 100-per-cent foolproof," Risula stated. "It's difficult to get around the outbreak of Bertha. Sometimes the only means left for producers to deal with them is through chemical action."

More information on Bertha armyworm control can be obtained by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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